

pare this to the heaven in its transparency, a thought which has as little to do with the idea of solidity as any poetical figure relating to heaven's azure vault has among ourselves. When Ezekiel speaks, in connection with heaven, of the "terrible crystal," his words should be rendered the "terrible hail" or ice of Heaven; and when Job compares the "sky," not the expanse, to a molten mirror, the connection shows that he refers to the brilliant tints reflected from the sunlit clouds.

We need not, however, remain on the defensive in this matter; but may assert, on behalf of the inspired writers, an accurate perception of the true relations of the earth and its atmosphere. Take, for example, an extract from that "hymn of creation" the 104th Psalm, which gives a poetical version of the first chapter of Genesis, and may be regarded as the earliest of all commentaries on that chapter:

"Who stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain;
Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters:
Who maketh the clouds his chariots,
And walketh upon the wings of the wind."

The waters here are those above the firmament, the whole of this part of the psalm being occupied with the heavens; but there is no room left for the solid firmament, of which the writer plainly knew nothing. He represents God as laying his chambers on the waters, instead of on the supposed firmament, and as careering in cloudy chariots not over a solid arch, but borne on the wings of the wind. It is obvious from this that the writer of this beautiful psalm did not understand Moses in the manner in which he is interpreted by some of the moderns.

Or let us refer to the magnificent description of meteorological phenomena in the 36th chapter of Job, which perhaps, in the beauty of its many references to the atmosphere, excels any other composition:

"For he draweth up the drops of water;
Rain is condensed from his vapor,
Which the clouds do drop
And distil upon man abundantly.
Yea can any understand the distribution of the clouds

Or the thundering of his tent?*

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Out of the south cometh the whirlwind,
And cold out of the north.
By the breath of God the frost is produced,
And the breadth of the waters is straitened;
With moisture he loads the dense cloud,
And spreadeth the clouds of his lightning.

* * * * *

Doth thou know how God disposes these things,
And the lightning of his cloud flashes forth?

Doth thou know the poisoning of the clouds,
The wonderful works of the Perfect in Knowledge.†

This is the same poem from which the description of the clouds, as resembling a mirror, has been already quoted; and it will be seen that it contemplates no atmospheric dome, but, on the contrary, speaks of the poisoning or suspension of the clouds as inscrutable. So also God is elsewhere said to have "established the clouds above,"* and to have "balanced the clouds,"† not by a solid substratum, but by his unchanging decree.

The attempt, in short, to fix upon the Bible the idea of a solid atmospheric vault is altogether gratuitous, as well as abhorrent from the general tenor of Holy Writ; and I may add that the expression, "God called the expanse heaven," is in itself a vindication of this conclusion, as implying that no barrier separates our firm of atmosphere from the boundless abyss of heaven without.

In very special connection with this subject is the question referred to in the previous lecture, as to the efficacy of prayer, "It is useless to pray for rain, since that is under the control of physical laws," is the doctrine of a noted physicist of our time. "Elijah prayed to God, and it rained not for three years and six months, and he prayed again and the Heaven gave rain," is the counter statement of Scripture. Which is the more truthful or scientific statement, or is there some truth in both? The Bible takes quite as strong ground as the physicist on the side of law. The weather is not with it a matter of chance, or the sport of capricious demons. God arranged it all far back in the work of creation. His laws are impartial also; for He sends His rain on the evil and the good. But the Bible knows a Law-giver beyond the law, and one who sympathizes with the spiritual condition of His people, and can so, in the complex adjustments of His work, order the times and seasons as to correlate fruitful seasons or drought and barrenness with their obedience or their back-sliding. That there is nothing unscientific in this a very little thought may show us. Let us take the case of Elijah's prayer. The worship of Baal was not quite so silly as at first we may think, even in the case of astute and practical people like the old Phœnicians and the Israelites. He was the sun god, and the study of nature shows us that the sun is the great source of physical energy to this world. In a physical sense, all things may be said to live in him and to be animated by his power. To thoughtful men, knowing no higher power, and yet retaining some religious feeling, he was almost of necessity the chief God.

* "His pavilion round about him was dark waters and thick clouds" (Ps. xviii.) explains this expression.

* Prov. viii. 28.

† Job xxxvii. 16.